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ABSTRACT

Critical theory focuses on the oppression of the individual, the group, and society by self-imposed or externally imposed influences. To emancipate people on all three levels of oppression, individuals must engage in a critique of the personal, situational, and historical forces which cause oppression. By the exposure of these forces and their juxtaposition against an ideal view of how these forces could be lessened, people become less oppressed and move toward emancipation. Critical theory is a personal responsibility and not just the responsibility of researchers who stand above the crowd and inform nonresearchers about how and what reality is. Under the critical perspective, people use their own insights as well as the work of researchers to understand and, ultimately, change reality. This paper presents a survey of critical theory. Contains 38 references. (BT)

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# CRITICAL THEORY IN EDUCATION

# PHILOSOPHICAL, RESEARCH, SOCIOBEHAVIORAL, AND ORGANIZATIONAL ASSUMPTIONS

by

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# CRITICAL THEORY IN EDUCATION: PHILOSOPHICAL, RESEARCH, SOCIOBEHAVIORAL, AND ORGANIZATIONAL ASSUMPTIONS

Critical theory focuses on the oppression of the individual, the group, and of society by self-imposed or externally imposed influences. In order to emancipate people on all three levels of oppression, people must engage in a critique of the personal, situational, and historical forces which cause oppression. By the exposure of these forces and their juxtaposition against an ideal view of how these forces could be lessened, people become less oppressed and move toward emancipation. Critical theory is a personal responsibility and not just the responsibility of researchers who stand above the crowd and inform non-researchers about how and what reality is. Under the critical perspective, people use their own insights as well as the work of researchers to understand and, ultimately, change reality.

## Critical Philosophical Assumptions

Critical theory posits reality as created by man. Critical theory also acknowledges the existence of objective reality and is thus ontologically consistent with the positivistic paradigm. However, Habermas departed from the positivistic paradigm when he proposed that knowledge could be partitioned according to the three basic interests served (Berrel & Macpherson, 1995). Giddens (1977, p. 140) presented a summative diagram of this hierarchical epistemology:

| Ontological Elements | Goal | Study |
|---|---|---|
| 1. instrumental action | 1. control and predict | 1. empirical |
| 2. interaction | 2. understand | 2. historical |
| 3. power | 3. emancipate | 3. critical theory |

The most basic means of attaining knowledge for the critical theorist is through empiricism. Overt human action is analyzed and scientifically studied in order to predict and control and Habermas classified physical science research as belonging to this domain. Social interaction is the next higher level of reality and must be studied in its historical perspective. The goal of such study is to acquire understanding and Habermas considered this level to be the domain of the practical. Critical theory is presented as the highest level of knowledge acquisition because its focus is on power and social power is the basis for inequality among mankind. The highest level of obtaining truth is critique of reality through the dialectic whether on an individual, social or societal level. Its goal is seen to surpass the goal of positivism because its goal is human emancipation. Critical sciences which operate in the emancipatory domain include politics and education (Bodner & MacIsaac, 1995). All three means of knowing are acknowledged by critical theorists and, as Foster (1980) concluded: "A critical theory must rely on both objective and subjective knowledge" (p. 8).

The means of knowing this reality is through the Hegelian dialectical process which is consistent with the Marxian evolutionary theory of society. Marcuse (as cited in Held, (1980) explained the basis for the dialectical process:

> Reality is comprehended as a process of becoming, in which reality as a whole, as well as each particular, individual part, is understood as developing out of an earlier stage of its existence and as evolving into something else. This entails grasping not only an object's positive features but also its negative qualities--what the historical object has been, what it is becoming, and what it is not--for all these things contribute to its character. (p. 229)

Thus, reality is defined by not only what it is but also by what it is not. Because of this contradiction inherent in reality, tension is created by these ontological polarities and, as Adorno (as cited in Held, 1980) explained, this tension must be resolved: "To understand and express this contradiction is to contradict reality. To contradict reality is not to leave everything as it is" (p. 221). Negative dialectics as the basis for evolutionary progress causes movement to happen because of the need of mankind to resolve the tension caused by the dialectical process.

Such tension is intrinsic to the human condition and is most explicit in the dichotomy between human consciousness and its created external reality. People view this reality as other than themselves; however, this reality is created by people. The alienation between object and people is resolved through the act of knowing. People are viewed as neither the subject nor the object of knowledge, but as the activity which produces the

tension through the knowing act (Kaufinan, 1984). While people are the cause of this alienation, people are able to step back through consciousness and acknowledge this dichotomy. Through the dialectical process, the tension can be resolved because people become aware of what they are and what they are not and are able then to know reality on a higher level.

The evolutionary foundation of reality causes change to be continuous. Adorno (as cited in Held, 1980) asserted that even if phenomena consistently change, the truth or untruth of phenomena can be judged. People are capable of such judgment because of their consciousness of this change. Horkheimer (as cited in Held, 1980) expounded on the knowability of reality: "The recognition of the conditional nature of knowledge, its partiality, does not lead to skepticism or relativism. Truth inheres in and is a moment of correct practice" (p. 177). Therefore, for the critical theorist, the goal is not to fully conceptualize all of objective reality. This totality of knowledge is impossible because of people's subjective mode of knowing. The goal is to increase people's knowledge of as much of reality as possible and this increase of knowledge is made apparent through human action.

The goal of critical theory, according to Popkewitz (1984), is to "change the world not describe it" (p., 45). To engage in the dialectical process causes an increased awareness of reality, and change occurs. Such change is not seen as serendipitous but as leading to the emancipation of mankind because the dialectical process enables man to distinguish between the real and ideal and move toward the ideal. As Hekman (1983)

explained: "It was emancipation that informed the Greeks' attempt to separate appearance from reality and thus liberate individuals from the false appearances of the social world" (p. 128). Evolutionary movement for critical theorists is not the imperative evolution of the Marxian position, but is, according to Horkheimer (as cited in Agger, 1983), a movement consisting of "contingent advances and retreats in the struggle for human liberation" (p. 350).

Critical theorists posit reality as being in a constant state of flux. Such inherent change is ordered, but not inherently because order is imposed. Critical theorists assume an evolutionary movement toward order at the individual, social, and societal levels. Such movement is made when all three levels engage in the dialectic and focus on the power bases because, as Brown (1978) clarified:

> The study of reality creation is a study of power, in that definitions of of reality, normalcy, rationality, and so on serve as paradigms that in some sense govern the conduct permissible within them. (p. 137)

Thus, while people attempt to impose order on an ever-changing reality, the knowledge of reality impels a forward movement of reality.

The historical and philosophical assumptions of critical theory can be traced back to concepts of Immanuel Kant. Kant's basic concept was that through the mind's interaction with the objective world, meaning and order are imposed upon reality. As a follower of Kant, Fichte (1762-1814) was the first theoretician to coherently express the assumptions of critical theory. Fichte viewed the individual consciousness as a

"continuously creative entity generating a perpetual stream of ideas, concepts and perspectives through which a world external to the mind is created" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 279). This process of creation was dynamic in that the external world became a means for people to understand themselves better through their conscious creations. Such creation and externalization and the interplay between the two became the basis for the concept of alienation which, as defined by Berger and Pullberg (1967), is a basic assumption of critical theory:

> By alienation we mean the process by which the unity of the producing and the product is broken. The product now appears to be producer as an alien facticity and power standing in itself and over against him, no longer recognizable as a product. In other words, alienation is the process by which man forgets that the world he lives in has been produced by himself. (p. 61)

Thus, peoples' creations are to be viewed as a means to understand reality and not as realities in themselves.

Fichte's concepts of the interaction and resulting alienation between human consciousness and its created external reality were further developed in the works of Hegel (1770-1831). Hegel proposed that absolute knowledge was the goal of human inquiry. This absolute existed beyond man and would be achieved when people understood created external reality as part of their consciousness. Hegel viewed consciousness and external reality as two sides of the same reality (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Only by understanding a concept (thesis) and its opposite (antithesis) could true knowledge or synthesis occur

(Kaufman, 1984). Synthesis resulted in a higher form of knowledge than previously held by human consciousness. This process, called the dialectic, was defined by Kaufman as a model that

> rejects the duality between mind and body or subject and object. Knowledge of reality is neither a result of inner experience nor outer sensory recordings but a dynamic relationship of an active organism and an active environment. (p. 69)

Thus, the dialectic was based on the integrity of internal and internal reality.

Unlike Fichte, who viewed the problem of alienation as a pathology of human existence, Hegel saw alienation as the motivating factor for people to engage in the dialectical process and thus achieve a higher level of knowledge. This knowledge would continue to rise to a higher level until absolute knowledge was attained and alienation no longer existed. For Hegel, human behavior was a dynamic social process and the dialectical process eventually would result in the perfect society.

This Hegelian concept of the consistent forward movement of society and the Fichtean concept of alienation were combined and expanded by Karl Marx (1818-1883). Marx viewed society as being engaged in an evolutionary process, but this process was not based on the Hegelian search for absolute knowledge but upon the search for an egalitarian society. The dialectical process occurs because power is distributed unequally among people and only in a classless society will evolutionary change reach its fulfillment (Applebaum, 1970). Marx concurred with Fichte's view that alienation was problematical

for human development, but tied the causation of alienation to the economic and political status of his times--capitalism.

For Marx, knowledge should result in action. Knowledge should cause men to change. To know for the sake of knowing could not influence the evolutionary process of humanity because action is the means whereby evolution is furthered since action brings about change. Kaufman (1984) summarized Marx's concepts on the relation between action and knowledge:

> Marx's doctrine maintains that the knowing of reality was also the changing of it. Knowing for Marx was not an end in itself; we know in order to act.
>
> Knowledge cannot be understood independently of its relation to action. Action, within a Marxian perspective, changes the objects in the environment acted upon and it also changes the subject. (p. 81)

Marx viewed this interrelationship between knowledge and action as intrinsic to peoples' natures. Knowledge produced change in people and change impelled action.

For Marx, the concepts of Fichte and Hegel became wedded in such a manner as to form the basis for ideas developed by the Frankfurt School in the 1930s. Held (1980) summarized the melding of these concepts by the Frankfurt School:

> The extension and development of the notion of critique, from a concern with the conditions and limits of reason and knowledge (Kant), to a reflection on the emergence of spirit (Hegel), and then to a focus on specific historical forms--capitalism, the exchange process (Marx)--was furthered in the work of the

> Frankfurt theorists. They sought to develop a critical perspective in the discussion of all social practices. (p. 16)

This coalescence of the ideas of Kant, Hegel, Fichte, and Marx by members of the Frankfurt School resulted in the theoretical position of critical theory.

Summary

The philosophical bases for critical theory are founded on the contradictory nature of reality. Reality is known both objectively and subjectively and both means of knowledge are utilized by people to differentiate between what is real and what is ideal. This dialectical process enables people to further the evolutionary development of knowledge and thus emancipate people from the false appearances of reality. In this process of emancipation, people assume power over reality because people truly are able to know reality; however, the constant flux of reality causes people to continue to seek to know reality as a whole, while only being able to know specific parts. For critical theorists, the attainment of truth remains contradictory.

The following philosophical assumptions incorporating the concepts of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Marx are the bases for critical theory:

1. Reality is both objective and subjective.
2. Reality is based on the dichotomy between human consciousness and its created external reality.
3. Reality is in a state of continuous change.

4. Knowledge is obtained through the interactive relationship between external reality and human consciousness (dialectic).

5. Knowledge would result in action which furthers the evolutionary process.

6. People consistently evolve toward a higher level of knowledge.

7. Knowledge moves people toward emancipation.

8. The goal of the search for knowledge is an increased awareness of reality.

## Critical Research Assumptions

The essence of critical theory lies in the person's exposure of the dichotomy between the real and ideal. The real is subjected to a critical examination in order to expose its contradictory nature. This exposure of the dichotomy of reality is termed criticism and was defined by Horkheimer (as cited in Bernstein, 1976):

> By criticism, we mean that intellectual and eventually practical effort which is not satisfied to accept the prevailing ideas, actions and social conditions unthinkingly and from mere habit; effort which aims to coordinate the individual sides of social life with each other and the general ideas and aims of the epoch, to deduce them genetically, to distinguish the appearance from the essence, to examine foundations of things, in short, to really know them. (p. 180)

Such intensity of investigation on the part of an individual is not for the purpose of mere exposure, but to determine what needs to be changed in society. As part of the evolutionary progress of society, this exposure of the contrast between the real and ideal, according to Popkewitz (1984), brings to the individual the knowledge needed to determine

what premises and assumptions of social life are subject to transformation and those propositions which are not.

Critical theorists go beyond mere muckraking to action. The exposure of the dichotomy of reality contains within its nature an imperative to bring real closure to the ideal because its goal is the emancipation of human capacities. Criticism seeks to show the potential for society's rational development because, according to Marcuse (as cited in Held, 1980), the exposure of dichotomy also displays the potential as an inherent element of reality: "It shows that this structure contains realized potentialities--potentialities created by a gulf between human existence and human essence, the unfulfilled, historically constituted abilities and capacities of human beings" (pp. 224-225). The imperative for change is essential in critical theory because what are exposed are not only the problems of society but also the ideal resolutions of these problems and, by nature, man evolves toward the ideal.

For a critical theorist, each person is capable of engaging in criticism. The individual seeks to discover the difference between reality and appearance in all areas of life: in relation to other individuals and groups, in an individual's conflict with classes of people, with the social totality, and with nature (Horkheimer, 1972). The means the individual uses to engage in such an investigation are both quantitative and qualitative because both objective and subjective reality is under investigation (Held, 1980).

Theory Derived From Criticism

The result of critical investigation of reality is the generation of theory. For a critical theorist, theory reverts back to the early Greek definition of "theoria" as a means of differentiating between appearance and reality. This definition is consistent with Held's (1980) statement on the meaning of theory to a critical theorist:

> The purpose of theory is to expose and analyze the hiatus between the actual and the possible, between the existing order of contradictions and a potential future state. Theory must be oriented to the development of consciousness and the promotion of active political involvement. (p. 22)

Theory is seen as a motivating force for action and is consistent with the Marxian view of theory as described by Willower (1979): "Marxists view theories not as mere explanations but as tools for social change. They should be assessed on the basis of their social consequences not just on their scientific merit" (p. 26).

According to McLaren (1998), critical theories are based on the premise that people are essentially unfree and inhabit a world of contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege. Therefore, theories must be dialectical in nature:

> Dialectical theory attempts to tease out the histories and relations of accepted meanings and appearances, tracing interactions from the context to the part, from the system inward to the event. In this way, critical theory helps us focus simultaneously on both sides of a social constradiction. (p. 171)

Critical theories acknowledge the interactive context between individuals and society because individuals both create and are created by the social world which individuals inhabit.

Theories expose the difference between appearance and reality and, as such, function only as motivators for action not as directions for action. This distinction was made by Habermas (as cited in Held, 1980):

> They cannot dictate and justify action. Theory can only be used to create agents capable of full participation in decisions concerning action and it can be used to support arguments in favor of certain courses of action. But it cannot be used, in any automatic or mechanistic way, to generate strategy or to ensure the success of strategic action. (p. 349)

Unlike theories generated under the positivistic perspective, critical theories elucidate the chasms between reality and the ideal which provide reasons and not directions for actions.

Because theory is to motivate the individual person, it must be understandable to that person. Otherwise, as Hekman (1983) clarified, "it fails as an explanation" (p. 132). Theory is to be a useful tool for the individual and, as such, the individual person not the scientific community determines the validity of theory. If individuals use a theory as a motivating force for their actions, then that theory is viewed as significant (Wellmer, 1971). This practical aspect of theory is of intrinsic value to the critical theorist, because,

otherwise, theory becomes a statement of mere words which have meaning for the objective researcher but not for the person engaged in human behavior.

Because critical theory is viewed as an explanation of reality which motivates people to action, theory is also viewed as normative not predictive (Fuhrman & Sizek, 1979-80). Theory is to be a motivator for action. Critical theorists are critical of the empirical notion of theory because, as Geuss (1981) explained, empirical theory is generated for the benefit of science:

> By excluding the normative and metaphysical beliefs, preferences, attitudes, etc. from the realm of rational discussion and evaluation, the positivist leaves us without guidance about important parts of our form of consciousness, and thereby abandons whole areas of our life to mere contingent taste, arbitrary decision, and sheer irrationality. (pp. 27-28)

Critical theory is practical and motivates people to action, whereas positivistic theory explains what is and purports to predict future behavior.

Such criticism of empirical theory is uppermost in the literature of critical theorists because empiricism claims to be neutral as to value. Objectivity implies a value-free position. However, empiricism has become extremely influential in the shaping of human history and has affected and continues to affect the values of society (Foster, 1982). This exposure of the dichotomy of the assumed value neutrality of empiricism is the essence of critical theory's position and is a prime example of the method of a critical theorist. Adorno (as cited in Held, 1980) viewed the role of critical theory as one of

examining the antagonisms of other theories in order to allow society to see the distortions of their positions, and this exposure of empiricism's dichotomy on the issue of values and objectivity conforms to Adorno's perspective.

The theory generated by critical research is not equal to the lawlike regularities discerned by the positivistic theorist. Because theory is generated in a historical, subjective, and objective manner, no laws can be formulated which hold true for all times. Boudon (1983) viewed theories as regularities which can be observed in the past, but not extended into the future because of the changes which occur both historically and subjectively. Horkheimer (as cited in Held, 1980) clarified this evolutionary role of theory:

> The theory which we see as right may one day disappear because the practical and scientific interest which played a role in its conceptual development, and more importantly the things and conditions to which it referred have disappeared but a later correction does not mean that the earlier truth was an earlier untruth. The dialectic freed from the idealist illusion overcomes the contradiction between relativism and dogmatism. (p. 182)

For the critical theorist, to extend current theory into the future is conjecture.

The general methodology of critical theory is accomplished by maintaining a critical perspective of all aspects of reality by utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods of investigation. The result of this criticism is to expose the dichotomy between the real and ideal. Such exposure generates theories which are evolutionary in

nature and which become a motivating force of human action. The test of a valid theory, for the critical theorist, is in the resulting human action.

Individual Emancipation

Members of the Frankfurt School developed more specific methodologies for exposing the dichotomy of reality. Critical theory is considered to be influential on three levels of reality: the individual, intersubjective socialization, and society as a totality. The ultimate goal is to change society, but such change cannot occur until criticism progresses from the individual through social groups to society as a whole.

To engage in the dialectical process, an individual must discover what reality is and what it is not. According to Marcuse (as cited in Held, 1980), this process occurs by individual "thought which must reconstruct the process whereby every being or entity becomes its own opposite and then negates this opposition by transforming itself" (p. 231). This thought process is termed self-reflection. To become aware of the contradictory nature of reality, each individual must become an observer of the relationship between his own consciousness and the reality he is attempting to understand.

This ability to engage in a reflective stance upon one's own relationship to reality is possible because the critical theorist incorporates both objectivity and subjectivity into this theoretical position. Adorno (as cited in Held, 1980) viewed the relation between subject and object as neither a duality nor a unity. Individuals are able to reflect upon themselves because of the internal relationship which exists between a person's consciousness and the reality which unfolds through a person's cognitive process. The act

of knowing allows individuals to reflect on the unity and duality between themselves and reality.

Geuss (1981) defined the activity of the self-reflection process as dissolving self-generated objectivity and objective illusion, making individuals aware of their own genesis or origin, and bringing to consciousness unconscious determinants of action. Self-reflection results in self-knowledge. By furthering understanding of self, one is able to achieve control over forces upon one's conduct that previously dominated the individual. Self-reflection results in power--power over oneself and the lessening of the power of external forces.

By obtaining more control over oneself, a person is able to become more emancipated, more self-determined, and less outwardly controlled. This freedom allows individuals to act more as they choose to as opposed to acting as others determine. The goal of self-reflection, as indicated by Denhardt (1981), is liberated human behavior. "To engage in serious and unconstrained self-reflection leads to self-knowledge and guided by self-reflection, we can engage in responsible social action" (p. 113). This relationship between self-reflection and action was clarified by Codd (1984): "Reflection without action is verbalism; action without reflection is activism" (p. 19). People are thus viewed as beings who are able to change personal behavior for the better and this occurs through self-reflection.

Consistent with the concept of self-reflection was the incorporation of Freudian concepts into the critical theory perspective by Marcuse. Herbert Marcuse related Freud's

psychoanalytic methodology to the self-reflection methodology of critical theory. Freud proposed that the conscious and subconscious represented different views of reality and the exposure of this difference would free the individual from subconscious traumas and allow the individual to engage in more appropriate behavior. This application of Freudian concepts to critical theory was explained by Hekman (1983):

> Freudian psychoanalysis provided a model of the proper relationship between the social theorist and society, a model that is consonant with the Greek conception of theory. Methodologically, Freudian psychoanalysis accomplishes this by integrating the search for nomological knowledge with self-reflection. In a broader sense, however, it is successful because the goal of psychoanalysis is identical to that of a properly critical social science: the emancipation of the subject. (p. 127)

In both critical and Freudian methodologies, people engage in discovering the difference between reality and the appearance of reality through the cognitive process.

To become emancipated and gain power over oneself is the ultimate goal of self-reflection. The results of gaining power over oneself will be demonstrated by one's actions. Habermas (as cited in Held, 1980) incorporated these concepts and developed a more precise definition of the actions which would result from self-reflection. He posited language as the resultant action which would demonstrate one's self-control.

Group Emancipation

Habermas viewed language as the means by which people hold power over other people. Whereas self-reflection provides people with power over themselves, language provides people with power over others. The resulting action from self-reflection is viewed by Habermas (as cited in Held, 1980) as occurring in a social format and language is one of the "crucial media through which the social life of the human species unfolds" (p. 271). Thus, after self-reflection, the critical process continues in language.

Action and language are intertwined. Giddens (1977) defined language as "the medium of doing things through communication with others" (p. 139). This communication is distorted when decisions are reached which only appear to reflect a consensus of those engaged in the communication. The apparent consensus is not real because of the inequality of power among the participants. The powerful people use communication to enforce their view of reality on the less powerful. A critical theorist needs to uncover this discrepancy between reality and appearance of consensus and expose the underlying power base which controls those in a subordinate position. For a critical theorist who accepts Habermas' concepts, methodology becomes a study of human language.

Consistent with the dialectical assumption, Habermas (as cited in Held, 1980) described the ideal communication process wherein power is equalized and undistorted communication can occur:

> The condition for a grounded consensus is a situation in which there is mutual understanding between participants, equal chances to select and employ speech

> acts, recognition of the legitimacy of each to participate in the dialogue as autonomous and equal partners and where the resulting consensus is due simply to the force of the better argument. In other words, the conditions of the ideal speech situation must ensure equal opportunity for discussion, from domination whether arising from internal or external constraints. (pp. 343-344)

Before people can expose the underlying ideologies in society, people must expose the underlying power struggles within the group of discussants and, thereby, enable the group members to engage in truly free communication.

Summary

Critical theorists accept the ontological and epistemological assumptions of both the objectivististic and subjectivistic positions and, thereby, utilize empiricism and case study methodologies. However, critical theorists move beyond these methodologies to self-reflection because of the theorists' assumption of the inherent tension between objective and subjective realities. By engaging in the dialectic, the objective and subjective aspects of social life are thought to be reconciled (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The focus for the critical theorist is on the exposition of the power bases in social life so that individuals, groups, and society as a whole can understand better such power and become less constrained by this power. Critical theorists seeks to discover the power bases of human action so as to enable people to behave more freely.

Critical theorists posit the following assumptions as the bases for research methodology:

1. The goal of research is to expose the dichotomous nature of reality through criticism.

2. Criticism involves the discovery of the difference between reality and the appearance of reality.

3. To discover reality, the researcher uses both quantitative and qualitative methods.

4. Theory is the motivating force for action.

5. Theory is defined as evolving concepts about reality.

6. The validity of theory is determined by the resulting human action.

7. The individual person engages in the dialectic through self-reflection.

8. The group engages in the dialectic through the study of communication.

## Critical Sociobehavioral Assumptions

Whether through self-reflection or the study of language, critical theory remains a social theory whose goal transcends the betterment of the individual or of a group of people engaged in communication. The ultimate goal of critical theory is the emancipation of society in its totality as becomes apparent in the application of critical theory to social and political issues.

### Evolution Toward Rational

The critical perspective of society focuses on society as a totality. The critical sociobehavioral theorist views a specific social event in its historical context. The specific occurrence is situated in light of its relationship to the totality of society because, as Held (1980) explained: "Every facet of social reality can only be understood as an outcome of the continual interplay between moment and totality" (pp. 164-64). As the event must be

studied in the context of the situation, so too must the situation be studied in context of its historical forces.

This interplay between the moment and the totality of social human behavior is possible because society is composed of both subjective and objective elements. Society is subjective because it refers back to the human beings who created it and objective because it cannot perceive its own subjectivity (Held, 1980). Society to the critical theorist becomes both an object to be studied and an experience to be lived through.

Society in its totality is seen to be rational but rational as defined by insight and critique. Historical forces have caused a distortion of reason in that the critical aspect of reason has been lost and, according to Giroux (1983), over-rationalization causes society to become irrational. This human process of reason is what enables people to be truly human and to function at their highest cognitive level because, as Habermas (as cited in Held, 1980) proposed, reasoning leads to people's ability to control the objective aspect of society by going beyond the creation of laws to overcoming of distortions of reality.

Society uses its reasoning powers by engaging in the dialectical process in order to expose those elements of society which cause people to experience alienation. Historically, the critical sociobehavioral theorist saw the rise of technology, mass communication, and institutionalization as having social and political consequences (Popkewitz, 1984). Such mechanization has moved society from a humanistic to an objectivistic position. Thus, the evolutionary movement of people has created tension between human society and a newly developed technical inhuman society (Horkheimer, 1972). This tension escalates to a level

whereby the technocracy created by people becomes a controlling element over people who then feel powerless to control society and this creates a sense of alienation which the critical sociobehavioral theorist views as a condition of society from which people seek to be released.

Societal Alienation

Alienation in critical theory is an inherent characteristic of society deriving from people's dichotomous objective and subjective nature. According to Horkheimer (1983):

> The collaboration of men in society is the mode of existence which reason urges upon them, and so they do apply their powers and thus confirm their own rationality. But at the same time their work and its results are alienated from them, and the whole process with all its waste of work-power and human life, and with its wars and all its senseless wretchedness, seems to be an unchangeable force of nature, a fate beyond man's control. (p. 46)

Societal alienation is viewed as a struggle between people's rational nature and the irrationality of the technocracy.

This alienation which each individual person and all of society experiences does not lead to the hopelessness which the existentialists posited. Alienation leads society to alleviate this tension by seeking to be more rational. The positive impetus of alienation on society is due to the dichotomous nature of society itself. While straining under profound alienation due to increased technocracy, society also contains the potential for rational development (Fuhrman, 1979). This potential is developed and progressed by the

exposition of the dichotomy between alienation and rationality; and society, by nature, moves towards rationality because, as Adorno (as cited in Held, 1980) argued: "Disorder in reality leads to the desire for order in thought" (p. 205). Society, in the critical perspective, is impelled to move forward to a more rational position.

Critical theorists are strongly opposed to the positivistic approach to sociobehavioral theory in that empiricism embraces technocracy and omits the humanistic element of society. Durkheim viewed alienation as social pathology and through the empirical model sought to incorporate technocracy into sociobehavioral theory. This produces "technical recommendations, but no answers to practical questions" (Bernstein, 1976, p. 187). Alienation, according to critical sociobehavioral theorists, cannot be assuaged by an objective union between the alienated elements. This pathology can be resolved only by acknowledgment and exposition of the dichotomy between the alienated elements and, thereby, through people's cognitive capacities, individuals can move forward to a more rational position.

This exposition produced by engaging in the dialectic process can lead to change. Change is not directly caused by the dialectic but is caused by people's inherent nature which moves toward rationality. Horkheimer (as cited in Held, 1980) explained this impetus for change: "Through reflection and critique, the object can become aware of its own limitations and through this awareness, it develops and becomes open to radical change" (p. 185). Change of society is a fundamental concept for the critical sociobehavioral theorist in that society is seen as existing in a constant state of tension

which it seeks to assuage. To continue to accept this condition and not seek to change for the better is viewed as oppositional to people's nature. The focus of critical theory is on the potentiality of people, and the status quo is seen as a foil against which the progress toward this potential is measured.

Movement Toward Emancipation

As society progresses towards its potential, it assumes greater control over itself and is thus viewed as being more rational and closer to being emancipated. Critical theory is tied to this emancipatory social interest because, as Giddens (1976) indicated, it seeks "to free men from domination by forces which they do not understand or control including forces that are in fact themselves humanly created" (p. 60). This emancipation must occur not just for individual persons but also for society as a whole. Society is impelled to move toward emancipation by progress through stages of social transition which Geuss (1981) described:

> Emancipation and enlightenment refer to a social transition from an initial state to a final state which has the following properties: (1) the initial state which consists of false consciousness and unfree existence. These two elements are then viewed as connected as unfree existence is defined as self-imposed coercion and false consciousness is seen as self-delusion. (2) the final state in which the agents are free of false consciousness by enlightenment and free of self-imposed coercion by emancipation. (p. 58).

Society must free itself not only from objective constraints but also from subjective constraints which it has placed upon itself.

As the individual must emancipate himself from his own self-imposed concepts, so must society. Society's self-imposed concepts which contribute to its alienation are termed ideology, and, according to Geuss (1981), critical theorists hold the criticism of society and the criticism of society's dominant ideology to be inseparable. Because of critical theory's positioning of ideological critique as intrinsic to its emancipatory goal, critical theory often is viewed as a radical political position, because social emancipation is defined as being obtained when society obtains power over itself.

Such emancipation through examination of contemporary social and political issues was determined by Held (1980) to lead to "the development of a non-authoritarian and non-bureaucratic politics" (p. 16). As each person moves toward freedom, so does society. This relationship between alienation, change, and ideology was clarified by Burrell & Morgan (1979):

> The consciousness of man is dominated by the ideological superstructures with which he interacts, and these drive a cognitive wedge between himself and his true consciousness. This wedge is the wedge of alienation or false consciousness, which inhibits or prevents true human fulfillment. The major concern for theorists approaching the human predicament in these terms is with the release from the constraints which existing social arrangements place upon human development. It is a brand of social

> theorizing designed to provide a critique of the status quo. (p. 32)

Society should strive towards greater human emancipation by the exposure of oppressive societal conditions. Critical theorists engage in the exposure of the oppression of such groups as gays (Ormiston, 1996; Athanases, 1996), women ( Lather, 1992; Marshall & Anderson, 1994), and African-Americans ( Lomotey, 1995; Hale-Benson, 1990) which are dominated by the prevailing societal ideology.

As the dialectic in which the individual engages creates a predisposition for change owing to the propensity of individuals to choose the rational over the irrational, so too does the exposure of the irrationality of contemporary ideology provide the impetus for society to move toward a more rational and emancipating ideology. The Frankfurt theorists sought to maintain this political perspective but also chose to refute Marx's position of placing the source for all social ills upon one form of ideology. Critical theory under the Frankfurt theorists does not lead directly to one form of ideology because critical theory, according Habermas (as cited in Bernstein, 1976), is a catalyst for action and not a justification for action:

> Theory can never be used directly to justify political action. When this demand is placed upon theory--when it is assumed that theoretical statements can provide an absolute authority in deciding what is to be done--both theory and practice are mutilated. (p. 216)

Critical theory assists the development of society by providing society with a more rational view of the status quo and, then, positing society's freedom to choose among alternatives.

Summary

Critical theory posits order as imposed on society and not as an inherent quality of society. Societal order possesses an historical significance in that through the dialectic process, there is movement toward societal order. Societal pathology in the form of disorder does not exist because deviation from order is considered to be normal. Conflict, therefore, does not arise from deviation from order but from other sources. Consistent movement toward order is made actual through self-reflection, egalitarian communication, and engagement in the dialectic. The critical theorist focuses on individual perception and on group interaction because the dialectic is utilized at both levels in order to alleviate the tension between objective and subjective realities.

The following assumptions are the bases for critical sociobehavioral theory:

1. Social events are related to situational aspects and to socio-historical forces.
2. Society is an object to be studied and an experience to be lived through.
3. Tension exists between human society and its created technocracy which results in alienation.
4. Alienation impels society to expose the dichotomy between the rational and the irrational.
5. Society evolves toward the rational.
6. Society must free itself from both objective constraints and from subjective constraints (ideology).
7. Ideological critique is an impetus for, not a justification of, action.

## Critical Organizational Assumptions

The critical perspective posits social structures as having no independent objective existence because social structures are created by people. Roles within such a created structure are studied not in the abstract because abstraction, as clarified by Berger and Pullberg (1967) reifies roles: "Roles are reified by detaching them from human intentionality and expressivity, and transforming them into an inevitable destiny for their bearers" (p. 67). Roles are human inventions which emerge from the values of both individuals and groups. Emancipation, for the critical theorist, must occur at both the individual and societal levels because, as Giroux (1983) explained: "Domination is twice historical: first it is rooted in the historically developed socio-economic conditions of a given society; second, it is rooted in the sedimented history or personality structures of individuals" (p. 28). Thus, social structures maintain and inculcate historical and political power from which people seek to free themselves.

Social structures such as organizations are one of the elements which critical theorists posit as a cause for human alienation. Organizations are viewed as man-made creations and social entities which exist of themselves. Geuss (1981) clarified this social phenomenon and its relationship to its creators:

> Social institutions are not phenomena; they don't just exist of and by themselves. The agents in a society impose coercive institutions on themselves by participating in them and accepting them without protest. (p. 67)

The reason for the imposition of such social structures is to provide the individual with a mediator between himself and the society as a whole.

Human beings tend to objectify their subjective creations and view these creations as entities with independent existence. Objectification causes the organization to be perceived as other than self-created and produces a conceptual wedge between the creator and the created object. This process is termed reification and the relationship between alienation and objectification in regard to organizations was described by Berger and Pullberg (1967):

> By reification we mean the moment in the process of alienation in which the characteristic of thing-hood becomes the standard of objective reality. That is, nothing can be conceived of as real that does not have the character of a thing--reification is objectification in an alienated mode. (p. 61)

Under the critical perspective, organizations are defined as "middle-ranged reified social constructs which intervene between the consciousness of individual human beings and their appreciation of the nature of the totality in which they live" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 311).

The reification of organizations which causes the critical theorist to view organizations as further sources of alienation from truth prompted Burrell and Morgan (1979) to term this critical perspective as "anti-organization" theory because organizations are seen "to mystify human beings in their attempt to comprehend and appreciate the nature of the totality in which they live" (p. 311). As such, organizations are a prime

source of criticism for critical theorists through which the alienation reflected in the organizational mode of life is unmasked. As a reflection of the total society, organizations are critiqued for the same pathologies which exist in society as a whole: rationality, communication, and ideology.

Critical theorists perceive that "under the sign of Taylorism and scientific management, instrumental rationality extended its influence from the domination of nature to the domination of human beings" (Giroux, 1983, p. 20). This influence occurred because the goal of instrumental rationality is prediction and control, while the goal of human rationality is emancipation and these goals are in apparent conflict. Institutional dominance contradicts human emancipation under the auspices of logic or, as Foster (1982) indicated: "It perverts rationality in the name of rationality" (p. 10).

Within organizations, communication is critiqued as being an impediment to the understanding of the totality. By using language which continues to reify organizations, communication maintains the status quo and produces further alienation from truth. Habermas (as cited in Bates, 1983) viewed this distortion of communication in organizations as "the major disabling mechanism that frustrates the celebration of community" (pp. 35-36). By reaffirming the segmentation of society, language prevents people from liberating themselves from reified dominance. Only by critiquing language can the dominance be exposed because "systematically distorted communication prevails among people. Such communication becomes normal, otherwise the repressive character

of social relations would become evident" (Ramos, 1981, p. 15). The role of the critical theorist is to expose such repression.

As a means of societal dominance, organizations have power over other societal structures and over members of the organization itself. To discover the basis of this power, the critical theorist seeks to expose not the apparent and superficial stated goals of the organization but the underlying ideology which is the source of the organizational control because, as Greenfield (1974) clarified:

> Without understanding the ideological issues in an organization and in particular without knowing what ideology is in control, the general principles of organization mean relatively little in terms of what people experience in an organization. (p. 11)

Ideology is the underlying belief system upon which actions are based and it is also the source of power in that ideology binds people in a sense of community which may not be understood by all members of the organization. The exposure and critique of ideology allows the members to decide if they want to continue participation in such a belief system or to change it.

Summary

Critical theorists define organizations a reified concepts. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979):

> Organizations as tangible and relatively concrete phenomena simply do not exist; the social world is essentially processural and emerges from the intentional acts of human beings acting individually or in concert with one

another. (p. 273)

Organizations are defined not by goals but by the prevailing ideology of the individuals and groups within the organization and by the ideology of the society in which the organization functions. Organizations are inherently processural or in a state of constant flux.

From such a perspective, organizational pathology is viewed as based on reification and the resulting alienation of people. This sense of alienation is caused by people seeing organizations as existing entities over which people have no control. Greenfield (1980) is representative of those theorists who posit reification as pathology when he argued:

> There is no external mechanism out there to control people. There is no group mind that thinks for the rest of us and will have its way. It is we who must have our way or acquiesce. (p. 40)

The critical theorist views organizational pathology as being resolved only when individuals and groups within an organization engage in a critique of the prevailing organizational ideology. This critique exposes the alienation and allows those engaged in criticism to move toward greater control over themselves.

Organizational inquiry by critical theorists is based on the following assumptions:

1. Organizations are created social constructs.

2. The purpose of organizations is to intervene between the individual and the society as a totality.

3. Humans reify organizations as objective and controlling entities.

4. Organizations are a source of human alienation.

5. Organizations reflect societal ideology.

6. Organizational inquiry involves the critique of underlying organizational ideology.

## Overview

Critical theory is based on the philosophy of an objective reality which can be discovered by both objective and subjective methodologies. While encompassing the concepts of positivism and subjective paradigms, critical theory posits a higher level of seeking truth by engaging in critique and, thereby, evolving toward emancipation. This theoretical position developed from the concepts of Fichte (alienation), Hegel (dialectic), and Marx (political power) and culminated conceptually in the writings of the members of the Frankfurt School.

The ultimate goal of emancipation is to be sought on three levels: the individual through self-reflection, social groups through the study of language, and the totality of society through critique of technocratic rationality. To engage in such activities exposes the innate duality between the real and the ideal and, by nature, man evolves towards the ideal. The focus of critical theory is on the responsibility for society which people must assume.

Critical organizational theory encompasses the elements of both positivistic and subjective organizational theory while holding these elements up to critique in order to expose the existing reality and further the movement toward truth. The basis for such critique is people's reification of their created social structures, which causes alienation to occur. "Alienation is a rupture between the producer and the produced" (Berger & Pullberg, 1967, p. 64); and this rupture allows the reified structures to maintain dominance over their creators by means of instrumental rationality, language, and ideology. Alienation can begin to be alleviated only when people realize that organizations are created by people and have no existence outside of people's minds.

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